

# Display behaviour of Shelley's Oliveback *Nesocharis shelleyi*

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**Parade du Dos-vert à tête noire *Nesocharis shelleyi*.** La parade du Dos-vert à tête noire *Nesocharis shelleyi*, une espèce à répartition restreinte confinée à la Zone d'Endémisme pour les Oiseaux des Montagnes camerounaises, n'a pas encore été documentée. Cette note décrit la parade d'un mâle, observé au Mont Cameroun, et fournit des informations sur son comportement et son chant.

The olivebacks *Nesocharis* are a trio of Central and West African finches (Estrildidae) characterised by their distinctive grey, black and olive plumage (Fry & Keith 2004). Shelley's Oliveback *N. shelleyi* is a range-restricted endemic of the Cameroon Mountains Endemic Bird Area, which straddles Cameroon, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). Little is known concerning its behaviour or breeding (Goodwin 1982, Fry & Keith 2004), and its nuptial displays are undescribed.

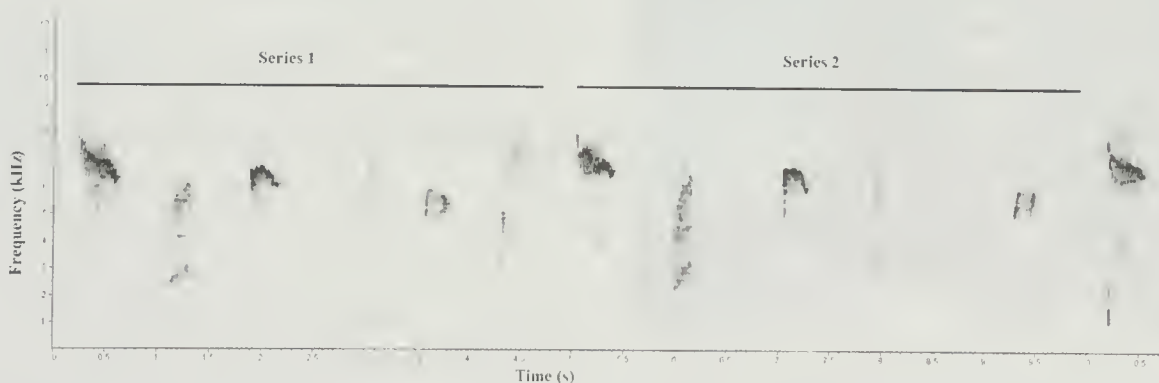
On 7 March 2009 I was observing birds on the Race Track above Buea, Mt Cameroon, with a group of nine other birders. At 14.00 hrs, at 1,700 m, I heard high-pitched calls emanating from c.4 m above the ground, directly above the trail. The source proved to be a male Shelley's Oliveback, distinguished from the female by its having an olive breast and whitish borders to the sides of the black head (Fig. 2). In its bill it held, by the very tip, an upside-down grass stalk with seeds, c.15 cm in length. During c.3 minutes of observation it hopped back and forth along a bare branch, singing as it did so. Some of the time its flank feathers were expanded. This is similar to the observed behaviour of a singing male White-collared Oliveback *N. ansorgei*, its sister species,

which sang from a branch 10 m above the ground, with its flank feathers expanded and its head and bill raised (Chapin 1959).

Eighty seconds of song were recorded in .wav format (using an Edirol R09 recorder with a Sennheiser MKE400 microphone). Recordings were inspected using Raven Lite software (Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2003–08) and a sonogram produced (Fig. 1). The song consisted of a repeated series of 4–8 different, high-pitched, buzzy trills, in the 5–8 kHz range. Within each series, trills differed in duration, pitch and structure, some having an upward or downward inflection, and others being flat. Pitch appeared to undulate between successive notes, and different trills were repeated in a similar sequence, giving the song quite a musical tone. During 80 seconds, the sequence was repeated 14 times, lasting a mean 5.7 seconds.

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**Figure 1.** Sonogram of the display song of Shelley's Oliveback *Nesocharis shelleyi*. The song consists of a series of 4–8 buzzy trills in the 5–8 kHz range and lasting 5–6 seconds; here series of five and six notes are shown.

Sonogramme du chant de parade du Dos-vert à tête noire *Nesocharis shelleyi*. Le chant consiste de séries de 4–8 trilles de 5–6 secondes dans la bande de 5–8 kHz ; ici des séries de cinq et six notes sont montrées.



**Figure 2.** Displaying male Shelley's Oliveback *Nesocharis shelleyi*, holding a c.15 cm grass stalk in its bill, Mt Cameroon, Cameroon, March 2009 (Ian Merrill)

Dos-vert à tête noire *Nesocharis shelleyi* mâle en parade, tenant une tige d'environ 15 cm dans son bec, Mont Cameroun, Cameroun, mars 2009 (Ian Merrill)

and Ian Merrill took some excellent photographs. Hilary Fry, Guy Kirwan and Ron Demey helped to improve the contents of this manuscript.

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